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1985/03/28



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CURRENT
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(U) CHINA: POSSIBLE LEADERSHIP CHANGES THIS YEAR^{1/}

Summary

Ample evidence indicates that Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang have high hopes for major leadership changes in 1985, including the retirement of many influential senior figures, culminating in a rejuvenation of the party Central Committee in September. They probably also have in mind a minimum program to promote younger reformers to the Secretariat and command positions in the military. Hu Yaobang hopes to engineer his own promotion to chairman of the two military commissions as well.

Deng and Hu themselves probably do not expect to achieve their maximum goals, but failure to achieve substantial changes in the Secretariat and the military--and to accomplish the retirement of some party elders from the Politburo--would constitute a setback for the succession.

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Secretariat

Hu's minimum program probably includes a transformation of the Secretariat's membership. Among those he undoubtedly wants to see removed are Qi Zhongxun and Propaganda Department Director Deng Liqun, both reportedly past rivals for the post of General Secretary. In fact, of the full members, almost all are due for "promotion" to the Politburo or removal for policy disagreements. Only Hu Qili

^{1/} (U) See also INR Report 1041-CA, "China: New Retirement Policy Likely To Affect Many Provincial Bosses," SECRET/NOFORN/NOCONTRACT/ORCON, March 28, 1985.

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- 2 -

is certain to remain a full member; alternates Qiao Shi and Hao Jianxiu should be promoted to full membership.

Hu's appointments to the new vacancies undoubtedly will be younger than their predecessors and associated with reformist causes. Likely candidates include Vice Premiers Li Peng and Tian Jiyun; Central Committee General Office Director Wang Zhaoguo; International Liaison Department Director Qian Liren; and a newly promoted military representative. Failure to accomplish at least the removal of Deng Liqun and the promotion of a few of these people to the Secretariat would mean a delay for Hu in consolidating his position.

Military

Deng and Hu probably also feel that they must make progress in passing on the military leadership before the year is out. The best case, and a seemingly growing possibility, is for Hu to be named Military Commission (MC) chairman and for Deng to retire. To consolidate this succession in the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Marshals Nie Rongzhen and Xu Xiangqian will have to retire as MC vice chairmen and be replaced by more identifiably reformist figures. Hu's accession to leadership in the PLA, to be considered fully successful, would have to be either preceded or soon followed by the retirement or replacement of a substantial number of staff generals and lower level commanders, and by a shakeup of the political apparatus.

Likely to benefit from Hu's rise and meaningful high-level retirements would be the current MC deputy secretaries general: Defense Minister Zhang Aiping, Chief of Staff Yang Dezhi, General Logistics Department head Hong Xuezhi, and General Political Department head Yu Qiuli, all possibly to become MC vice chairmen. These four, in turn, could be expected to hand over their functional positions to younger military reformers--who would be hand picked, or at least warmly supported, by Hu.

In the General Staff Department, Chief Yang Dezhi seems a good candidate for retirement. His replacement could come from within (Xu Xin or another deputy chief of staff) or from outside (for example, a regional commander such as Li Desheng or Qin Jiwei). In addition, the promotion of several new deputy chiefs of staff seems likely.

Yu Qiuli--a consummate survivor and current director of the troublesome General Political Department (GPD)--remains the most problematic character in all of the leadership change possibilities. He could win a big promotion in the reorganization--even to Chief of Staff or Minister of Defense--or he could be forced to retire. In any event, if Hu Yaobang takes over as MC chairman,

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the GPD Political Department probably will undergo major changes, including retirement of several old deputy directors.

Air Force Commander Zhang Tingfa (age 70) may retire, possibly with a promotion to MC vice chairman. At least one of his subordinates will retire, and Wang Hai--well known to US attachés--could succeed as Air Force commander. Air Force Chief of Staff Ma Zhanmin seems a good candidate for promotion to Air Force deputy commander.

Navy Commander Liu Huaqing also seems likely to move on--either to a promotion (neither Chief of Staff nor Minister of Defense can be ruled out) or to retirement. His successor could be either of two present deputy navy commanders--Fu Jize or Nie Kuiju--or a regional fleet commander.

Politburo

Another difficult problem--and perhaps the most crucial--is the retirement of the Politburo's elder statesmen. A case can be made that efforts are under way by Deng to engineer the retirement of Li Xiannian, Chen Yun, and Ye Jianying from the Politburo Standing Committee: There are recent reports that Li will retire; Chinese media at the Spring Festival portrayed Chen as house-bound; and reports of Ye's terminally ill health are frequent--all fuel speculation that Deng may convince the three to retire together. Deng also presumably would agree to a nominal retirement.

If this senior trio can be persuaded, a number of lower ranked Politburo members would have little choice but to go along. This group includes Nie Rongzhen, Xu Xiangqian, Wang Zhen, Yang Dezhi, Zhang Tingfa, Deng Yingchao, Song Renqiong, Hu Qiaomu, and Fang Yi. In addition, Wei Guoqing almost certainly will finally be removed after more than a year in disgrace.

Peng Zhen remains a problem. At 82, he is older than any of the Standing Committee members except Ye, but he remains active and in apparently good health. Should vacancies become available on the Standing Committee--or should Li Xiannian retire as President--Peng is the obvious candidate for promotion. Whether Deng can convince him to swallow his ambition and retire as well is a crucial question.

The Politburo most likely will get some new members, whether current members can be persuaded to retire or not. Alternates Qin Jiwei and Yao Yilin are probable candidates for promotion from alternate to full membership, and Qin possibly will receive a substantive PLA promotion as well. Yao, after months of apparent political decline, seems to be taking a more active role and may emerge as Chen Yun's "successor" as a conservative reformer. Chen Muhua, in view of her recent move to the People's Bank of China,

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- 4 -

seems likely at least to retain her alternate status and possibly to achieve promotion to full membership. New faces on the Politburo could include Hu Qili, Chen Pixian, Gu Mu, Qiao Shi, Zhang Aiping, possibly Xiang Nan--if Xiang is reassigned to Beijing, as is often rumored--and Ren Zhongyi (concurrent with his reported reassignment as head of the Central Party School).

State Bureaucracy

President Li Xiannian could retire from this post without stepping down from the Politburo Standing Committee (although probably not vice versa). However, to do so entails a potentially difficult decision on his replacement. Although Peng Zhen would love to step up to the presidency, the appointment of Peng at age 82 to succeed a man five years his junior would send the wrong signal. Li--and Vice President Ulanhu--probably will remain in office for at least another year. If, however, Peng steps down or is promoted to the presidency, Chen Pixian is his most likely successor as chairman of the National People's Congress.

Forced retirement for age could eliminate most of the NPC vice chairmen. If the leadership exempts this position as a sinecure, however, little change will occur. Possible retirements include all but Bangen Erdeni, Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme, and Yan Jici. Geng Biao and Huang Hua are not as old and infirm as many and thus could present a problem. They might step down only as part of a larger package.

In the State Council, Premier Zhao Ziyang is unlikely to leave his post. In a few years, he may be "promoted" to President, but for this to happen now would be a disturbing sign. Of the four vice premiers, both Wan Li and Yao Yilin might well be simultaneously "retired" and promoted. In such a case, at least two new vice premiers likely would be named. Tianjin Mayor Li Ruihuan's name has been mentioned in this connection. Of the state councillors, only Chen Muhua, Wu Xueqian, and Wang Bingqian seem safe on age criteria. Likely to go, however, are Kang Shien and Ji Pengfei. Other possible retirements include Zhang Aiping, Zhang Jingfu, and Song Ping.

Ministries where changes are possible include the State Planning Commission; State Economic Commission; National Defense Science, Technology and Industry Commission; the Nationality Affairs Commission; the Ministries of Defense, Water Resources and Electric Power, Geology, Metallurgy, Machine-Building, Ordnance, Astronautics, Coal, Petroleum, Light Industry, Railways, Culture, and Radio and Television; and the Physical Culture and Sports Commission.

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- 5 -

Conclusions

Chinese history and culture and the experience of Communist Party-ruled states, however, hold out little hope that high-ranking, individualistic leaders will voluntarily retire. Certainly none of them except Deng has given any indication of a serious willingness to do so. The more likely scenario seems to be that a few elderly Politburo members will retire or step down for reasons of health, and a few will be ousted.

The operational focus of party affairs and policy deliberations will continue to be the Secretariat, bolstered by the elevation of younger protégés of Hu and Zhao, while the solution to the age and conservatism of the Politburo's membership will be left to the future by promoting new members and allowing the elders to hold their positions for the few years left to them. In this case, Deng would be gambling that such a compromise would be adequate to ensure a reasonably smooth transfer of power to Hu and Zhao.

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